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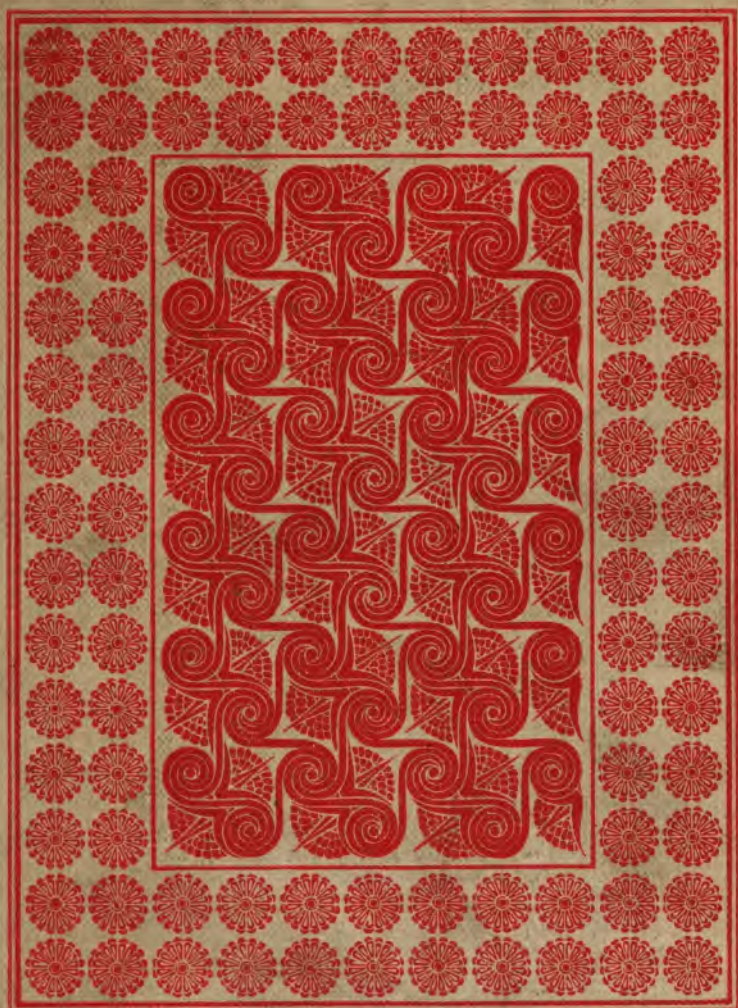
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# IN CAIRO



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Received **April 27, 1931.**

J. k. Lothrop

Jan - 1892



**IN CAIRO**



# IN CAIRO

BY

WM. MORTON FULLERTON

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Gift of the estate of  
Mrs. T. K. Lathrop  
Rec. April 27, 1931.



TO THE  
REV. SAMUEL LONGFELLOW.

MY DEAR FRIEND:

*These impressions of mine, I confess it eagerly, were recorded most especially for my own pleasure. But then, when it occurred to me to show them to others, the public of which I thought, as embraced by that word of indefinite boundaries, was only the public which already had learned to love Cairo, and which, as I hoped, might like to verify its impressions and revive the old affection in these pages.*

*Yet now I am even bolder, and I shall be disappointed if what I have written turns out to be meaningless even to a larger public—to people who do not know Cairo as yet, but whom I would lead to the suspicion that it is adorable among the great cities.*

*I would wish that, sombre as may appear the Cairene colours and the Cairene light through the undelicate medium of my prose, this little book may still help to prevent travellers fresh come into the oppressive charm of so new a world from feeling any sickness for home. And to be dépaycé, as Frenchmen sometimes say, in a word untranslatable in English by one equally precise, is for travellers such a common experience of pain!*

*But whether all these aspirations, a little vain, will be vain in, to me, a less gratifying sense I do not know; yet of you, my dear old friend, I feel sure. So it is to you especially that I send this book, largely because it recalls the first time when as a traveller I spent unforgettable days without your sympathy. Can we ever forget, we two, the evenings in the garden by the Rhine at Coblenz; our afternoon wandering in that old world valley of Birkenau,—the place among all soothing and enchanted spots where Mr. Stevenson's Will of the Mill should have been born,—when I left you at the little wirthschaft to climb the Feldberg, now three years gone the first May; the great burst of Italian sunlight over our heads in Verona; or Botzen and Venice and Freiburg, Treves, and the Hartz and Mont Saint Michel, and then my first England, so long a home to you and to all who bear your name, with all the memories conjured by these and other words that mark the pages of our "purple year"?*

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*Yes, in Cairo you were missed; and later on not less when I found myself in Athens. And that other friend who was with me there,—he, even though he had met you but once in the quiet library of Craigie House, was always regretting with me your absence too. I wish I could have reproduced his drawings here to show you one of the reasons why you would have found it pleasant to be with us. But once we men begin regretting, and when should we ever cease! Never for my part; never at least so long as to regret restores to me the vivid reality of a friendship like to yours, as these memories do now to*

*Your devoted*

*W. M. F.*

PARIS, July 26, 1891.





## I.



TO the traveller at his first visit Cairo is as bewilderingly engrossing as Venice, and as little intelligible. One goes to Egypt with a certain small number of single preconceptions, almost all of which are as definite as that of the pyramid, which no one at any time has been without, somewhere in the background of his vision. To most of us Egypt means three or four things only : a long narrow strip of eternally enriching water in the midst of a green avenue of country leading away and away into a thousand leagues of un-

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known region ; all along its banks, beyond the fringe of reeds in which dwells a kind of ubiquitous Moses, always rocking in his cradle boat, Titanic temples and sphinxes and palms innumerable ; a Lotos air where even mummies are youthful and blandly happy, and by no means out of place ; and an eternal land of dream rudely awakened of late from its long sleep by fanatical pretenders to its throne, and Englishmen attempting to solve an Indian question by settling as well an Egyptian problem.

But up the river from Cairo the course of one's imagination is plain and straight, however full of confusion the ideas that centre about Alexandria ; and when one finds that henceforth Egypt is to mean other things than blue air, yellow desert, green soil, a river, pyramids, palms, and a political muddle, the first surprise is bewildering, and it is not impossible that disappointment will be a symptom of that surprise.

For every one makes Cairo the point of vantage; and the mingling of Oriental dainties called by that name in the *menu* of the nations is for a time the most indigestible dish in the world. If only the skies would sometimes be cloudy or even if it would sometimes rain, so that you could sit by a fire at your hotel and rest your eyes and mind, it would be some relief. But an untarnished series of bright days does not permit any such arrangement of your impressions. Consequently, before you have prepared in your brain a proper nest for the new ideas and pictures, you are so annoyed as almost to wish at times that you had never begun collecting them, and to long to get away into some better known region, where, as the psychologists would say, things can be more easily apperceived. You really doubt if you like Cairo, and fear that the disappointment which you feel is an indication that you have become irrecoverably *blasé*. In this



mood nothing suits you. You go to the races or the games at Gezireh. Here, under a splendid avenue of *lebbek* trees gently curving in its wide ellipse, you drive in your "victoria," English faces all about you. In the brightest of colours and jauntiest of dresses very, very English people indeed are crowding into the enclosure in front of the open fields, and filling the seats of the "grand stand." The stretch of field might be English; so might everything except the farthest background. Only the palms and the bright sand cliffs of the citadel in the sun, with the dome and minarets beyond the long line of scarlet uniforms just in front, remind you that you are not at some sporting meeting on English soil. This is all very well in its way, but it is certainly a little out of place here, and not the sort of thing you came to Cairo to see. You seem too near to Bond Street, and sentimental travellers with a sketching

tablet or a note-book in their pocket will be a good deal annoyed.

But all this is a mistake and soon wears off. After a time you learn to enjoy the contrast between what is English and familiar and what is Egyptian and only making towards the familiar. The home-like aspect of many things to both English and Americans, which comes from the growth of Cairo as a winter fashionable resort, is pleasant and would be missed. Although European society there is sometimes pretty frivolous, and vapid enough to be "in good form," its life is to-day one of the special characteristics of Cairo. Other features may be more inalienable, but none seems more natural.

The political prominence of Egypt ever since the days of Mehemet Ali, and more especially during the last generation, has given to that country and its capital a conspicuousness which has attracted thither not only tourists from every people in

Europe, but large numbers of winter residents, French, German, English, and Italian, who return again and again to its peculiar charm. All nations gather thus at Venice, at Monte Carlo, at Baden-Baden, and in Switzerland, but nowhere just in the same way as at Cairo. It is fitting that the air should be cosmopolitan; and so it is. Upon the steps of your hotel, without changing your position, you may hear French, German, Italian, Arabic, Greek, English of every dialect, and American. In the shadow of the pyramids all this seems a veritable modern revival of the babel of tongues about the Shinar tower. But, as it should be, I suppose, there is a saving preponderance of the English language; and with the polo, the balls, the races, and the riding, Cairo begins to impress itself upon you as an English town in which any quantity of novel Oriental sights are kept for the æsthetic satisfaction of the inhabitants,

much as the proprietor of a country place keeps a game preserve or deer park for his own amusement and that of those who are so fortunate as to share his hospitality.

The Egyptian is fast adapting himself to English ways—only, however, as the latter will find later on, to remake his conqueror, and to gain that dominance which seems to be in history his eternal right. Yet now, just now (how odd it is!) the “Want to go shootin’ to-day?” is as frequent an inquiry in the streets as the “Want a donkey?” or the vaguer “Want any t’in’?” which covers a multitude of sins.<sup>1</sup> The whole native population out of the Bazaars, the Muski, and the quarter of old Cairo, seems for the

<sup>1</sup> Among those pleasant essays of M. Gabriel Charmes that I have read since these notes were taken I find these words: “Very often in the streets of Cairo I have been struck at hearing little donkey boys murmuring in the evening. . . . I know not what unintelligible words between their lips. Every time I drew near to catch what they were saying, I noticed that they repeated, with the hope of learning them, some words of English that they had managed to catch from the conversation of their employers.

moment to be fast making towards the condition of the natives in India, or, to suggest a parallel, to the Virginian form of life before the American war. At the last you accept English Cairo as a real Cairo, which is not in your lifetime likely to pass away. And it is not for more than a period of ten days that you talk sentimentally upon the way that the old Cairo is losing its identity.

They communicated each his knowledge to the other. In Upper Egypt I have constantly been saluted with a 'Good morning' or a 'Good-bye' while formerly they said to me 'Bonjour' and 'Bonsoir.' This change of itself has made me feel more keenly than anything else how much the situation of France in Egypt has changed." *L'ÉGYPTE*, par Gabriel Charmes. Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1891, p. 310.



## II.

**F**OR I venture to say that there is still enough of the old likeness to leave no opportunity to those who have once seen Cairo to snub it on any plea of its being so transformed. It would be a serious mistake to say of Proteus that he loses his identity simply because he seems to change. The original ungrafted characteristics are still, as I said, varied enough to be embarrassing and bewildering. But they are Arabic and Mohammedan rather than old Egyptian, as you had without reason expected to find them. I have

spoken of Venice. After Venice Cairo has a desecrated charm. It never quite succeeds in being what you demand of it. Its spirit doubtless can be exhausted. But the trouble is you never seem to get any nearer that self-satisfying stage. No air in the world so tempts you to put everything off until to-morrow; and I think almost all travellers have constantly with them the sense of letting rich opportunities go by, literally of losing many really golden hours. You never can content yourself with wasting time in-doors. Yet, go out under that bright sun, and you have nothing in particular to do. Even the artist does not know where to begin to work. If you go for a bird's-eye view on a donkey's back, as I heard an Irishman say he had been doing, your perplexity is by no means unravelled. This, however, is a thing to do, however sore the memory of the experience.

Our first ride was a revelation. It was

the morning after our arrival, and with my Irishman again, I am sure I should have regretted it ever after, if I had not taken it. We went jolting through the narrow streets, dashing recklessly round corners, winding in and out of a motley crowd of men and beasts, our donkey boys at our heels, and constantly urging this most long-suffering of beasts to a pace as undesirable as it was uncalled for. I am bound to record, however, that it was during this uneasy ride that I was first reminded forcibly of Cairo's likeness to Venice. A donkey shooting so unexpectedly and noiselessly round the corner of those narrow streets, with a cry beforehand from its master to warn others of its approach, is not so very different from a gondola bending silently round some palace corner, in a narrow Venetian *calle*, with a premonitory cry from the gondolier.

But here the parallel ends; and when the donkey begins its bray all memory of



Venice is driven out of one's head. One has never known the full eloquence of which the donkey is capable till one has been in Cairo. The voice of a Cairo donkey may be heard far above all other sounds. And if but one donkey begins to bray it is sure to find varied and sincere sympathy from every quarter. Answering each other all about the town, they seemed to me like rival horns of steamers making their way cautiously in a fog. Their hee-haw never is anything but agonising; in their case never does familiarity breed contempt. But aside from this little eccentricity the donkey is in a certain way a winsome creature. The charm of its countenance is enduring. I have never seen two with the same expression. They always have a comfortable air of amiability, and sometimes even an appearance of dapper alertness of mind, which makes of any one of them a very accessible sort of person, whom you feel as if you would

like to know better. They have a really human aspect at times which explains scores of Arabian tales of the magical transformation of men into their semblance.

But this is true of all animals in Egypt to an extent that cannot be appreciated by any one who has not seen them there. The eyes are human, from yak and camel even to the untolerated dog. The Egyptians have always lived so much more with the other animals than we that very likely the beasts in Egypt have taken on a certain number of human characteristics which, forced as they are in other countries to associate only among themselves, they have not elsewhere assumed. But at present this were to inquire too curiously. At all events, I never ceased to be delighted with the donkeys in Cairo, and one animal only ever gave me greater satisfaction. This was the Egyptian goat. The goat's self-satisfied air as he bobs his Roman nose through the world is

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constantly amusing. They seem to feel that there is no one looking, that the world was made for them, and that they know all that there is to be known ; and you would not disillusionise them for anything in the world, any more than you would enlighten certain friends of yours who are so blandly contented with themselves.



### III.

**B**UT if the animals are satisfactory in their suggestion of the old Arabian tales, modern Cairo on the whole is not.

One of the first impressions, gathered from a donkey's back, is how far Cairo goes towards reproducing for you the past, but how far short of the goal it stops. The ideal of Arabian life that the *Thousand and one Nights* portrays is never satisfied. Modern Cairo is a ruin decked in bright colours, and the sadder for the glow which has a hectic look. Sooner or later you find that your donkey has

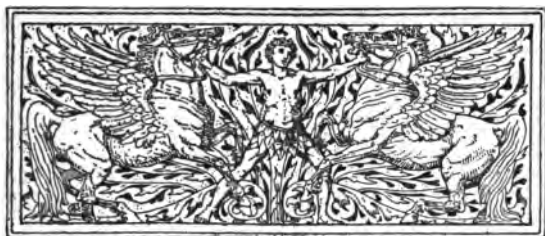
carried you to the neighbourhood of a great mosque on a hill in the centre of the city and you look down upon the flat roofs. Over all is an ashen look, like the colour of the adobe huts of the Peruvian Indians. From this point Cairo is a city that seems to have been buried in lava, and like Pompeii to have just been brought to light in the melancholy drab of its nakedness. And there is the desert beyond which seems ever encroaching. Below is the blank desolation of an Arab cemetery, with a white hot glare on the stones and along the endless avenues of sand between them. There is nowhere a sign of life. Cairo itself seems a forsaken grave.

So you are very glad to hasten back to the cool shadow of the high houses and the overhanging windows. Here indeed is a rush of life. Water-carriers, loaded camels, holy families at every corner, chickens with hawks hovering

overhead, money-changers, dogs picking up crumbs, and women carrying their children on their backs or astride their shoulders, a strange wild funeral procession with the turban of the dead man carried high on a pole at the head of the coffin, and the wailing mourners following; curled up figures in blue on the ground; in short a wonderful panorama of mingled Biblical and Arabian suggestion. The *yashmaks* conceal the faces of the women even when they are at work. I have seen women who were sorting beans like Psyche, or her middle-aged descendant, Cinderella, wearing *yashmaks*. The women are so veiled that it may well be said of them, as my friend did, that in Cairo he is a wise son who knows his own mother. Curiosity is piqued by the *yashmak*, and that, I suppose, satisfies the sex. At all events the *yashmak* is one more element in the elusive and ever-changing expression of a Cairo street. This multitudinous

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and indefinite impression of Cairo is like the unique and uncertain odour of the combining scents placed on your handkerchief by the dealer in the bazaars. In its strange contrast to our own life, it is quite impossible to take Cairo seriously. It is too spectacular. It seems a fair—temporary at the longest. To paint it you need rainbow colours and an eternity.



#### IV.

**B**UT back from the Muski, accessible only to the “open sesame” of a wide experience in threading mazes, pervaded with a various warm glow of subdued tones, of musty browns and dusky golds and old burnt reds, are the Bazaars, where the light is more subdued, and the air more restful. The vendor of “impossible” native pastries and the variegated hawkers of Arab odds and ends and orts, the modern Oriental haberdashers in the Joseph’s garb of many colours, penetrate here at times; and occasionally some naive



little Lady Jane Grey of a donkey comes pattering through the passages and vanishes round a corner; but here for the most part is a dignified and serene and old-world atmosphere of calm.

Nowhere in the Bazaars do you more feel the spell than in one of the enclosures devoted to the carpet merchants. Here, about the recessed gray walls of stone, which are broken up into an occasional mullioned window with rare carving and graceful columns, are piled hundreds of Persian carpets and beautiful old rugs, over which others are draped in magnificent folds. Here are the reds of damsons, of Pompeii, of burnt carnations, blues of the sky, of the turquoise, of the peacock, and of blue eyes, the yellow of mandarins and lemons and of straw, pinks, ivory whites and greens, but all tempered so harmoniously as to produce an indescribable rich glow of dusky splendour. On some of the rugs is a sheen that is

like the gloss on the breast feathers of a dove, or on a black tourmaline. At one end of the inclosure in a recess, all turbaned, bearded, and robed, sit hour after hour two or three old men whose ancestors must have been grandees of Bagdad, chatting and talking gossip under their breath as if mouthing rare state secrets. Every pose of theirs, every gesture, every look, is that of gentlemen of the world, rich in wives and goods, and used to courtly ways. Their well-bred air of distinction delights as much as it surprises. In the middle of the afternoon they smoke on their rugs, and sip coffee from dainty little china cups. If you stay a few moments here yourself to read, or write, or sketch, with a fine courtesy you are handed a cup as sweet as theirs, and as black, with the same pretty burnt gold bead of the liquor at the edge, and as steaming hot. You catch the chirping of birds high up among

the stones and rafters between you and the sky; and now and then the far-off strumming of some simple-stringed instrument. The baaing of goats may be sometimes heard without, a burst of hearty laughter, the bray of a donkey, or a raucous street cry; but here in this corner they do not much interrupt. The place is secluded and the air is restful.

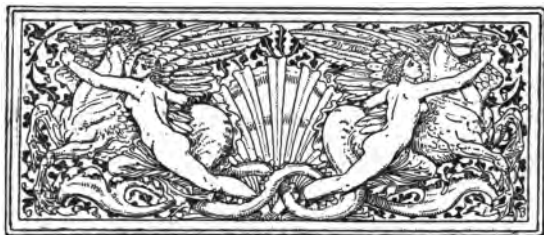
Undoubtedly here the Bazaars are at their best. But something of the serenity and the calm of this spot pervades them all. Perhaps this is because there is just enough quaintness to arrest the attention without distracting it; and this is not so true of the rest of the town. This impression, however, is rather one that is left in the memory after a visit to the Bazaars than altogether definitely made upon you at the time. For there is no lack of bustle and noise, and there is constant change of scene. One should sit quietly alert for an hour or two at

several busy points to know their continuous and unique interest. You seem more than ever to be dreaming over well-known pages out of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

A corner among the workers in brass is as good a place as any. The air resounds with the multitudinous clicking of hammers and of chisels as the red-fezzed heads of boys and men bob rhythmically over their work. There is a place here at the meeting of four ways where you must sit that you may watch to fullest advantage the passing life. It is at the entrance of an old gateway of a mosque, rich red and yellow far within, with stones shaped into graceful cusps in the Arab arches that spring from solid masonry; hollows where shadows lurk, and where delicate little fringes of fine stone tracery woo the birds to build their nests. There is the soft old radiance of quiet harmonies here that is given off from the best of

the Eastern rugs. Above are delicate latticed windows that seem to veil a whole world of coquetry, but which let in through their narrow openings a little light upon that old Arabian past when it was a glory in Cairo to be a woman; alas, to-day how changed! Round the corners, just outside the gate, with a flash of sun upon them, are the brass plaques with their high yellow tones, and the hanging lamps. Underneath sit the merchants till the late afternoon. And up and down goes the strange life, passing quickly across your vision from one corner to vanish at another, like actors on the stage hurrying from wing to wing. You sit indeed as at the play but as one who has come too late, and you must make up your mind to do without the plot. You have a melancholy satisfaction in your own isolation amid the rush of the world. What this all means in its long story, in your despair

of ever knowing it, you at last think you have quietly resolved not to care. And you give yourself up to the lazy delight of being simply the recipient of casual æsthetic impressions, and to the enjoyment of whatever you have time for before lunch. Sometimes in its eagerness to share its goods with you there is an obtrusive attention to its own business on the part of the world here, but for the most part it minds its own without encroaching upon yours, so that you can indulge yourself in harmless ways quite at your ease. The play is unending; the actors seem never out of sympathy with the text; the costumes are prepared with the fullest attention to local colour; and the stage setting is worthy of the players. But then after you have looked a while you will long for a western comedy.



## V.



TRAGI-COMEDY, but not an English one, you may find any Friday afternoon by a visit to the howling dervishes.

I had been told not to take the trouble to see the dervishes, "because," as my benefactor said, "they are a fraud." One day my friend and I, while walking before dinner, came upon six Catholic priests in black long-skirted garb, riding on donkeys abreast, quite filling the road. The sight immediately aroused to laughter; it seemed an absurd satire on an honoured cloth; to some the incongruity would have been

even more than droll. But I found no more reason immoderately to laugh at the dervishes than at the priests; and one was no more a sham than the other. The howling dervishes should be heard. Their howling sets one a-thinking.

The order which we visited has its weekly religious howl every Friday in the ancient mosque of Kasr el'Ain, out towards old Cairo by the Nile. A crowd, much too large for the small vault-like chamber into which it was hotly pressing, waited in front of the closed doors of the inner sanctuary, so to speak, of the mosque. The doors were suddenly opened and everybody rushed in, brandishing chairs to find a desirable seat. Underneath the high dome of the chamber, whose walls were covered with texts and a few weapons, kneeled a barefooted circle of men, most of them long-haired, sallow, monkish. A few younger men, upon whose cheeks the forced habits of religious



exaltation had not yet placed a touch of weirdness, were at either end of the circle, where it broke towards the leader, and two or three small boys were present doing their best to acquiesce in the evident intention of bringing them up in the way in which it was thought that they should go. You gaze, and wait, and wonder as you watch. The leader, spectacled, bearded, and grave under his green turban, kneels on a mat, commanding the line. In front of him are strange instruments of the tom-tom sort; and at his left an old gentleman with a simple flute made of a Nile reed. A hush glides over the assembly, and with eyes cast down the leader mumbles a prayer. Immediately the long line breaks into response, at first in quiet, slow, and measured tones, then faster and faster; keeping time, time, time, in a sort of Cufic rhyme, by the swaying of their bodies. It is the Muslim creed they are affirming so

vociferously; and even the unpractised ear frequently catches the name of "Allah la Ilaha." Faster and faster, in perfect time, swells the wild chant, every now and then an unchecked howl rising out of the more even modulation, like the braying of wild asses or your wildest dreams of the war-whoop of the American Indian. Suddenly the leader raises a warning finger and as suddenly a hush reveals the presence of the echoes that have been keeping pace. For a moment there is not a sound or motion. Then, low and mysterious, comes the mumble of the leader. The dervishes rise to their feet. Their coats and turbans are thrown off, and the "la Ilaha" again begins, while the bodies sway. In a moment the din is intolerable. The tom-toms and tambourines are beaten. A single dervish strikes up a high falsetto solo note, keyed rockingly above the barbaric roar of the drums, like a bagpipe, rising and falling

in thin queer unhuman sounds with a weird cadence that is unearthly and with a sort of demoniac charm. The flute now begins a distinct clear melody as plaintive yet as wild. It chimes in with the bagpipe voice to produce a harmony indescribably strange. Faster and faster again the long hair streams and the bodies bend, as if swayed by some mysterious tempest. The excitement is contagious. And still the flute note and the bagpipe voice, keyed high, strain up the already taut nerves of the dervishes. Heads come perilously near smashing against heads. Finally the long cadence of the creed is exchanged for an ecstatic puff, for all the world like the sound of the piston-rod of an engine getting up its steam, as they repeat simply the word "*hu, hu, hu, hu hu hu, hu hu hu,*" *he*, meaning God alone. "*Hu hu hu, hu hu hu, hu hu hu*" it runs on and on. And still the flute is heard with a wild sweet melody below it all. Several

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of the dervishes, wracked and delirious, stagger back upon the audience. But in a moment it is all over, and in most conventional European fashion when at a house of worship, you are leaving your piastres at the door. And as you come from the dervishes and drive away in the dust, it may chance to you to find yourself repeating out of the book of the Preacher—of him who wrote not vainly amid a world of books which, ah, how truly, he thought wearisome—some wise sweet phrase of pessimism that haunts your memory even beyond the walls of the Hareem of the old Khedive, nor yet is forgotten amid the modern music of the Esbekieh garden.



## VI.

**B**UT always to me in Cairo one of the most interesting places was the old garden behind Shepherd's Hotel. I sought it out whenever I was being bored during the process of a compromising effort on my part to be fashionable in Cairine ways and to kill time. Time has lived long enough here in Egypt, and with such considerable distinction for having done its duty for the most part, that it may be said to have earned a right to a restful and quiet old age. But few people whom you meet in Cairo, however, are impressed with this

idea. Consequently, there being no demand for the sort of atmosphere that fills the spaces of that garden, no one knows the existence there of a supply of desirable narcotic influence. My friend and I could scarcely have got on without it, however. For even when, on account of the flies, we could not enjoy ourselves in the garden, it was a satisfaction to know that there really was in Cairo a quiet corner where the busy murmur of the Bazaars and the bagpipe of the Highland regiment were never heard; a corner so quiet indeed and so remote that there was a mystery about it in its seclusion, as of some place where there was an unknown life and an invisible host of strange influences. Here, for the first time, I felt the full meaning of the tale in the *Thousand and One Nights* of the old man who was eating dates, and, carelessly tossing about the stones, hit a passing *gin* in the eye, whereupon he nearly lost his life, so

great was the giant's rage. Some dim recollection of this affair was constantly in my mind, with other notions as vague, of the place being preoccupied by some other person or persons than myself, and of my being an interloper. I found myself walking half on tiptoe through the tangled shrubbery. The place had a fascination about it, and I returned to it again and again.

I do not quite know how that fascination arose, or why over the garden seemed to hang the pathetic interest that always clings to places desolated of men; for though running to a wild waste and a shaggy tangle, the garden was by no means deserted, but pervaded by its own proper sights and sounds that had very much to do with the life of to-day and the happiness of three or four hundred guests at Shepherd's. All the fruit, except the apples, on our table noon and night—the oranges, dates, bananas, and mandarins,

and even the almonds, came from there ; and sundry old men, very good fellows and exceedingly good-looking, were engaged in desultory gathering of it. The rest of the time they lounged with their wives in front of a wattled hut of sugar-cane that seemed to me to be the "lodge in a garden of cucumbers" of Hebrew literature ; or smoked a cigarette, occasionally *backsheesh* of my own, against the gray plaster which but half covered the rude rubble supports to the roof of the *sakieh*. Here their sole business was to keep two blinded oxen circling at an even pace about two monster wheels, each of which caught the cogs of two other wheels placed at an angle perpendicular to them, and, turning constantly above a dark well of water, continually lifted in clay pots, like the pitchers of the Danaids, the water, which was thence carried off for the irrigation of the place. All through the day went the *tattoo* of the



cogs and the cool sound of water splashing in the hollow cistern. This was a typical Egyptian scene, and I never wearied of it. A *lebbek* tree hung over the roof, and several splendid great quiet oxen, in whom the restful spirit of the place seemed incarnate, were brooding quietly in the sun just in front. They seemed to have solved the mystery of existence, and to be lost in contented wonder at the vision of the great design. Beyond the wattled roof, swaying with a stately grace against a sky of the bluest blue I have ever seen, rose random palms with their floating tufts, showing on the side of the sun with the gold-gray glow of the desert. Sweeping round and round above them, tracing with an infinite ease grand lines of beauty, circled the hawks. A pigeon would flutter to the *lebbek* tree and interject its muffled coo, like the ring of a sweet bell coming up through depths of pure spring water. Then several jackdaws

would hold a conservative council on a palm. And always went the quiet *tattoo* of the cogs, and we knew that the oxen were at work fulfilling the duty to which they had been called.

The oxen came to stand to me for the *fellahin*, as I watched them here day after day and beheld their patience, their content, their conservative persistence in the beaten track, their docility, their simplicity and sleepy calm of life, as they served for a few hours, then rested in the sun. Occasionally they stopped in their steady walk, but only for a moment, and with no thought of anarchy or of "striking" work. Their labour was really not arduous, and (I have quite forgotten now the ox in the fellah) nature does for them almost everything. Work on their part would be a piece of supererogation. The Egyptians are, and have always been, spoiled children of too indulgent parents. Ruled and ruler equally betray the danger

of letting children go unchastised. The sense of personality which has given to Northern races the distinction of soul-expression in science and in art, and the shadow of it,—which is the sadness we find among the dwellers in cities and the sense of the pain of living,—are the good and bad results which have come from forcing a people to work out their own salvation; for in the Northern zones Nature seeks to kill rather than to generate or fill with life, and the mere difficulty of living develops sterner qualities. In the South she is the Mother of Plenty, and she bids you grow, and to work only when you will, having no thought for the morrow, for sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

And so she brought up her children in Egypt to dally with time. Nothing seemed too great for them to attempt in a land where the skies were blue for ever. Men died, to be sure, but only as flowers

that droop, or as a bird that flies no more. It seemed always some strange mistake, almost an optical illusion indeed. It could never have seemed to the Egyptian an ultimate order of Nature that men should die. However often his eyes met death, he never could have learned that everything that lives has its doom appointed at the end. To-morrow or to-morrow or at least to-morrow there would be some change. Death always must be a mystery, but one only temporarily insoluble; a curious contradiction, unexplained, but not in time inexplicable, to the surest of all external facts, the fact of life. And so as to those who chanced to be struck down, who just before had known the joy of living under the blue of that sky, and who loved the circle of the hawk and the taste of the date, but who now seemed to have lost so suddenly all sense of the fair world where they had been so happy, it was all a mystery; but they would wake soon,

and so they must be made ready for the waking.

We wonder at the Egyptian custom of embalming the dead. It does not seem to me so very strange. It meant the nation's natural nescience of death. And this was one thing that Nature taught them in a very good-humoured way while she indulged them and won their confidence. This I found out within sound of the *tattoo* of the *sakieh*. And it was not until I had left the garden and was listening to the overture of *Semiramide* at the Alhambra, that I recalled how she taught us other things in England and America, and Germany and France, and wondered where she was her truest self, which she was fondest of—Memphis and Sakkarah, with the vaults of Apis underneath the desert, and the multitudinous scarab of the tombs; or London, with the tower of Westminster; and Paris, with the dome of its Academy.

But there was another side to all this, and I have not forgotten the skeleton at the feast. The garden was always lovely, whether we saw it from amid its own shrubbery or at a distance, from the windows of our rooms. The sun set behind it, and at twilight the tints beyond the palms, standing so dark, serene, and tall against the sky, were too exquisitely soft and melting to be painted in anything save suggestive words for those who have already seen them. At this hour, when all Nature seemed waiting in an unaccustomed mood of calm, and smiling with a trustful smile of subdued joy, I recalled the Egyptian custom of which we hear so much and understand so little—the habit of introducing at banquets the little figure of a mummy. Most of us, I think, have thought it an indication of morbidness or an affectation. It was not so, but only the echo, as it were, of one oft-reiterated accent in the loud voice of their bright

world; a devout resignation of feeling on their part in the melancholy, inevitable half-truth of death, which, whatever little else it might or might not be, was evidently the most serious fact of life, and one that it was only natural in a man to keep ever present before him. Thus, lest he should ever forget it, it seemed proper to remind himself of it by proper symbol at the proper time.

All this was quite clear to me during these twilights across the garden palms. Between my window and the garden were three or four noble *lebbeks*, growing in a large open space. Above them at this hour hawks were always circling and crows were flying home. And then the bats came out, flitting with eccentric humour against the sweet pink sky. The place and the hour were both appropriate for what then inevitably I was wont to see. A solitary Muslim, spreading his reed mat under the *lebbek* trees, always

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came at this hour, quietly removed his shoes, and placing them together at his side with a flask of water, began his evening prayers. And he went on praying in the calm air, rising and falling in weird rhythm of motion, until the dusk had quite come on, and the evening star burned bright through the leaves. This was my nightly view. And finally, one evening beside the evening-star hung the new moon, walking in brightness.





## VII.



AM sorry now that we did not go more often to the river. The spot where we were wont to go, and where we got to know a little in regard to it, was near a flight of steps that break the river wall where the shipping comes up at Boulak. Just a little up the river opposite were the *lebbek* trees of Gezireh and the palms along the shore, with a line of *dahabiyehs*, white and green, where the gray Nile washed the bank of lighter gray. Often a cool breeze blew down the stream, breaking the surface into a thousand

ripples that caught the sunlight. Our seat was high over the river in the corner of an open Arab *café*, where old gentlemen played dominoes all day long on ten pounds a year, and which deserves to be famous for its coffee. The Egyptian boy who brought it with the live coal to light our cigarettes droned us monotonous nosey tunes that were not musical but amusing, and like the droning of a bumble-bee in a meadow. Here we sat and watched one of the most entertaining sights in Cairo.

Along the dirty gray line of our shore, where breaking walls and mud-huts, like ugly swellings of the dry soil, were crumbling into the Nile, stretched in picturesque perspective a forest of slender masts, their white sails wrapped close about them. Below were dark blue hulks, out of which they sprung so beautiful in their slender grace and gentleness of curve. Between them and the smaller craft of the ferry

boats, and just in front of us, was a constantly-changing throng of life; women bending over the water washing, blue spots or pink against the gray river, girls filling their water-pots as they stood with their robes pulled high above the knee, men with water-skins to be loaded upon the backs of donkeys, whose ears were pricked forward as eagerly intent upon the busy life below as we, and boys sorting bunches of white parsnips in osier crates, and washing the green leaves. And just in front of us were the steep steps, with the water-pots constantly appearing over the edge as the tide of women set upward from the river. There was activity without commotion there below, no hallooing or crude sounds, but the steady hum of busy people, the plashing of the clothes against the water or the dull thud of them against the stones, and the sough of the waves against the flat bottoms of the boats.

A jackdaw fluttered by above us to a mast with a familiar croak. Ibrahim, our host, fast asleep on his back just behind us in the sun, indulged himself in a confiding snore. Gulls sat rocking in the mid-stream, and the low barges dropped down to their moorings.

This was a fascinating point from which to study the characteristics of the people, and their way of living. The old Egyptian type of the monuments is rarely seen; but occasionally a truly ideal shape glides across your vision as you sit indolently sipping your coffee, and the sight makes up for long impatient waiting. But there are no positively ugly forms, and not infrequently at Boulak there were pretty faces. It was not by any means altogether the effect of the simple folds of the drapery that convinced me that the lines of the body were graceful and the forms lithe. Yet, strange as it may seem, I know no better place in the world

than this to show how well the Greeks copied nature when they set themselves to model. In succession the girls went down the steps to the river, their dark robes hanging from their shoulders without support at the waist, with the water-pots on their heads, like a line of sun-burned *caryatides*, while the dress caught on their breasts as it blew back in the wind. The forms were straight and splendid, the hair glossy and coarse as one sees it on the poor old heads of the royal mummies in the museum at Boulak. With the same sort of bracelets and rings too as still adorn the wasted limbs of these mummies, their descendants, or at all events their heirs, the young nineteenth century daughters of Egypt made brilliant contrasts on their brown skin. The black eyes under the deep brows, and the circle of gold bangles on the dark full neck, were more than once striking elements of almost wholly beauti-

ful pictures. The sweet long rhythm of the Hebrew lines in the Song of Solomon often came to me.

*"I am black, but comely,  
O ye daughters of Jerusalem,  
As the tents of Kedar,  
As the curtains of Solomon.*

*I have compared thee, O my love,  
To a steed in Pharaoh's chariots.  
Thy cheeks are comely with plaits of hair,  
Thy neck with strings of jewels."*

But only of the best type was such lyric enthusiasm legitimate. The average among the women are of a far coarser order, fat, to use an ugly word, and sometimes patched with collops of flesh. Even the merest girls, who were often attractive, had frequently the full physical development of mothers of more Northern races; and other well-remembered lines from the same rich poem came back to me in illustration. There was a certain

appropriateness, however, so that one could not be displeased, in the swelling lines of the bust of these dark-skinned maidens, in the rich fulness of animal development it betokened, here in a land where all nature seemed bursting with plenitude of life. One soon learns in Egypt to understand the lusciousness of phrase in the Oriental literature, its unthinking abandon of rich suggestion, its quick and startling comparisons. "Truly the light is sweet," said the author of Ecclesiastes, "and it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun." But the same sun that breeds the maggots and the flies that eat out the eyes of the Egyptian children is warm in such lines as these :—

*"Lo, the winter is past,  
The rain is over and gone ;  
The flowers appear on the earth ;  
The time of the singing of birds is come,  
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land ;  
The fig-tree ripeneth her green figs,*

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*And the vines are in blossom ;*

*They give forth their fragrance.*

*Arise my love, my fair one, and come away."*

So near is the Egyptian to the soil that even to himself under the hot sun he must seem almost as much a part of nature as the palm. He must always have felt himself of holy origin. The great god the Sun lay in the lap of the warm Earth, and the fruit of the union was the Egyptian. But birds and plants were his sisters and his brothers. Equally with them he was dependent on the rising Nile and the comforting strong warmth of the Unchanging Sun. No life was possible here between the sands without their supernatural intervention and collusion. Even plants, I believe, if isolated for ever in Egyptian air, would finally learn to think: they would wake quietly to a knowledge of themselves. And gradually they would feel the cravings that lead towards society, and after a time choose rulers and lovers,



and begin to put together with pain difficult ideas about themselves and the gods, and some day perhaps even write the epic of their origin and future.

What more natural for the Egyptian than to make land, river, and sun divine, actual demiurgic beings, so full as these powers were of a mysterious life, and a life so all-important to the race that was waking to a consciousness in this narrow strip of fertility in the desert? And if these great powers were divine, so must be their offspring. Hence we find the Egyptian worshipping, or, at all events, cherishing as sacred, the beasts and the birds and the crawling creatures all about them, as well as believing themselves immortal and their kings gods. And it did not seem to me after all quite so ignoble a thing, certainly not so strange a one, this involved Pantheon of Egypt, and the difficult doctrines of her esoteric metaphysics.

The Egyptian religion was born of the country.<sup>1</sup> Its secrets were a genuine wonder, a sincere, almost awful humility, and, for the reasons I have given, an idealisation or sanctification of common things. It set apart the dog, the crocodile, the ibis, the crow, the bullock, the beetle, lifting them to a level of sympathy with man, their brothers, all being children of the same bountiful giver, Cybele. All things, therefore, had a right to live, for they were divine. I know scarcely anything in the old faith, in the simpler

<sup>1</sup> How well said this of Gabriel Charms : "L'Égypte était pour elle [the Egyptian race] un pays idéal et, lorsqu'elle songeait à se forger l'image d'un monde meilleur, elle se contentait d'y multiplier les richesses et les plaisirs de celui-ci . . . Qu'on imagine dans ce milieu fait à souhait une population douce, vigoureuse, nullement passionnée, satisfaite de peu, ne demandant qu'à vivre en repos, s'amusant du spectacle de sa propre activité, bornant ses regards à la voûte immaculée d'un ciel où le soleil accomplit avec une régularité si éclatante ses révolutions périodiques, et l'on comprendra sans peine que l'art des anciens Égyptiens devait être réaliste, que leur science devait être pratique, que leur religion elle-même devait être naturaliste et avoir pour forme supérieure un panthéisme qui s'est d'ailleurs tellement perfectionné qu'on a pu quelquefois le confondre avec le monothéisme." Pp. 99, 100, Gabriel Charms, *L'Égypte*, Calmann Lévy, 1891.

doctrines of the earlier thinkers among the priests,—before their thinking became overlaid with superstition, I mean, and made too subtle and pedantic by teachers more clever than poetic,—which cannot be explained from this point of view. And I was not surprised, but quite prepared, on going to the Boulak Museum, to find that on a certain inoffensive looking stèle from Abydos, some king who had learned wisdom of the River and the Sun had caused to be written :—

*“ Adore the king in your souls, keep always his Majesty present in your hearts, for the king is an omniscient god who lives in hearts and whose eyes penetrate all souls. He is the sun-god . . . who lights the two Egypts better than the sun’s own disk, who makes the land to flourish better than the Nile at its inundation, who fills the two Egypts with power and life . . . who gives goods to those*

*who follow him, and life to those who walk in his ways. The king is life, abundance is his name; his existence is perpetual creation. He is the god Khnoum who forms every creation, a creator who brings forth intelligent beings. He is the goddess Bast who protects the two Egypts, when all people adore the work of his hands; but he is the goddess Sokhit against those who resist his rules."*<sup>1</sup>

"I cannot help thinking," says M. Maspero,<sup>2</sup> "that the Theban priests would not have understood so clearly as they did the unity and the supremacy of Ammon if the Theban kings had not extended their sway, and consequently the sway of the god of their royal city, over the half of the known world." Yes, undoubt-

<sup>1</sup> In the old museum—alas for the shade of Mariette for what may now have become of that quiet garden!—number 127. It is a stèle of the XII. dynasty.

<sup>2</sup> *Guide du Visiteur au Musée de Boulaq*, par Gaston Maspero. Boulaq au Musée, 1883, p. 154.

edly there were many less consecrated links than I have indicated in the chain of cause and effect, binding to its simple origin the later subtleties of the Egyptian temperament; M. Maspero is right. But I was bent for the moment only on noting the inevitable spirit which, breathing along the surface of this beautiful and solemn country, must have directed the serious thinking of so impressible a race. The very Nile, running eternally from out a mysterious source,—a Nile brazen and opaque, or rosy and pink and diaphanous, according to the mood of the day,—carried the thought, by that magic of suggestion and association that links all rare emotions, into a world of pleasant pain filled with the melancholy seduction of the unknown. The land has always been a charmer more seductive than her who for the great western world has so often been her symbol. Like Cleopatra in giving herself to her lovers,

she has remained after all mistress in reality as well as in name. And how ravishing to the finer observing sense those repeated attentions from a magnificent nature which appears whole-souled and plausible, but in which, while it seems to give largely of itself, and to its own destruction, it still in reality manifests only the veiled insolence of the high-endowed—an insolence which the Greeks, incarnating it in their Prometheus, dreaded as the unpardonable sin! The land of Egypt, seemingly for ever passive and inert, has feigned submission to its conquerors only in the end to become the real Circe of history. It has inoculated its children with its spirit—some will tell me with its languorous poison; but more often, I should say, with its clairvoyance and its insight. For witness its discovery, obvious as day, clear to it as the light, that even the king was a god as well as the beetle, the emblem of eternity, and that he was

as much greater than the sun as he was greater in intelligence.

Yes, Egypt spoke two languages in such exalted tones of passionate and rhythmic sweetness as expression gets among men only when it trembles with love. The land conformed everything unto itself, and with a positive yet effortless influence forced its children into a mood of human naturalness and sympathy that was scarcely less attractive in its beauty than the simplicity of flowers and birds and beasts. When before have all things been so favourable for the birth of men stamped with the mark of the sons of God? With the happy banishment of complexity went also the sense of multitudinous temptation in living and life's anxious responsibilities. The seriousness of the people and their simple joys; their profound impartial sense of life and death at once; their easy passionate ways in all the human relations of love, as is witnessed

in the amorous poetry of the papyri which has caught such accents of emotion as only the naive East is suffered to express unblushingly, — this winsome agreeable temperament, which is at one moment so sad and at another so joyous, must be forever unintelligible to the bustling world of the West. Of its clear and eternal elements of charm, when that charm is unalloyed, the West has had little capacity of recognition. And this unhappy West, as the ages drive it farther and farther away from the Egyptian starlight and the Eastern sun, would seem to be losing for ever the mystery, the warmth, and the allurements of its faith.





## VIII.

**B**UT even in Egypt there is a very different faith to-day. Of the mosques I cannot write adequately, for a single one I loved so much that I had no eyes or thoughts for others, and have now no heart to tell of any other. The architectural idea of the mosque I thought at first unequalled in its adaptation to worship. But that was because I had seen at the time only those open to the air and sun, with the avenues of columns and the cloisters, and the healthfulness that seemed to inhabit the great open

spaces was pleasant ; then, too, there was the sun and stars that could always be seen by the worshipper. But afterwards I found that there were two or three normal constructions of a mosque, and saw that many of them were jewel-boxes as dark as the Gothic cathedrals of Europe, and I was less willing to generalise. In my perplexity I lost to a degree my affection for the earlier ones I had visited, even though the dusky frets of dainty arabesques and the light blue of long tiled walls still remained on the curtain of my eye. But never did the quiet sublimity of the mosque of Sultan Hassan fail to be signally impressive.

Here better than in the Bazaars or the life of the streets underneath the *musra-biyehs*, and here first, you feel the spirit of old Cairo. Coming through a dark passage into the great court, you are caught up suddenly as by a wind of inspiration proper to the place, and borne

out, over the broken tessellations of the coloured pavement, up a mass of masonry, browned and crumbling in time, and soaring to a splendid height that is always a surprise, to the square of open sky of Egyptian blue, framed by the simple triform blossom of the stones at the top, and fleckless, save when a hawk swims into your ken and describes its circle over the heads of the worshippers kneeling below. Just before you, in the centre of the court, supported on eight stone columns, a beautiful dome of wood broods over a cistern of water which is never at any moment quite at rest, but ceaselessly throbbing with a glint of gray walls in its black depth of gloss. But lovelier than all is the loveliness of the circle of the fast-falling frieze of Arabic characters that still remind the visitor that Sultan Hassan dedicated this building to "Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate." This embroidery in wood is dark, and delicate, and

rare. You remember nothing like it; words here have actually become beautiful in themselves quite apart from their meaning. The dome under its crescent is cracking. The *las* are broken and are *alifs*; the *was* are swinging round and the *ains* are all awry, but still with a unique and indescribable kind of beauty in ornamentation, like a band of some highly-prized textile fabric, it lends that touch of refinement and delicacy, of softness, and, I know not why, of warmth, which the great bare walls of masonry require to render their cold sublimity less oppressive and the whole effect single in its beauty. This dome over the well does everything for the first impression to the spectator in this court. It makes a whole of what would otherwise be incomplete.

But this is only the entrance to a certain holy of holies beyond the pulpit and the Mecca wall, where lies, in the shadowed centre under a great height of dome, the

tomb of the founder. A direct ray of sunlight never penetrates here to heighten the lustre of that polished marble in the form of the simple sarcophagus, with pomegranate flowering of stone at the corners. But through deep-set mullioned windows, that must be cut in masonry ten feet thick in the walls, and high in the lantern of the dome, cusps and cornucopias of the searching sun stream on the side walls above the floor in the morning and the afternoon. And over each of the three recesses in each of the three walls, a single deep blue circle as of turquoise seems to have caught the glory of the sky. Just under the lower windows, above the panels of marble and alabaster and rich mosaic, arabesque and lovely stone embroidery of flowers, reaches round the walls a frieze of wood, in strange monstrous Arabic letters, weird and beautiful, brown and writhing in snake-like segments with a certain horrid fascination and mysterious loveliness. It

is the girdle of the dome of the kiosque in the court over again, with an effect heightened on account of its surroundings to a double impressiveness; and it lifts the eye to the strange wooden structures above, which cling like gigantic mud-wasps' nests to the four corners. The effect is beyond expression in words. At one corner the outer covering of the wood has quite fallen away, and the substructure is revealed; it is like the bones of some prehistoric creature whose fellows died on some remote mountain peak in the depths of unvisited space. Though the note of the fantastic is so strong, there is here a certain religious spirit which it is impossible to analyse. Its pathetic awful beauty in its decay seems to lift the soul to a serene state of acquiescence in inevitable laws. Here one believes that whatever is must be; that what will be, will be. Obedience here is seen to be the only law, the only method of happy existence.

Times and places are obviously but the methods of the soul's activity; amid all things that change only one thing is changeless and identical—self, soul, personality. Living and dying are nothing; nothing really is but spirit, life—life within us and without.

Something of all this is whispered over the tomb of the great Sultan, and carries one back quickly over the long gulf of the ages to the distant world of the First Egyptian Empire and to the tombs of Ti under the sands of Sakkarah. I think this the most impressive mausoleum in the world. But it is this because it is something to-day quite different from what it was intended to be. The dust from the desert has covered all, and, with the unseen air, with a slow inexorableness of method, has touched all the place with the pathos of decay. You feel a Silent Demolisher to be somewhere hiding. He but bides your going. Then infinitely quietly

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He will advance to the destruction. Other things are here at work than most men care to take into account. Something forgotten in this workaday world, in the glare and the whirl of it, has here found a resting-place. And suddenly to come upon It fills you with a certain awe. For you see that while the Eternal may be Love, He is Law, and that though the hairs of our head may be numbered, so are our years.





## IX.



UT finally the time came when we could visit Sultan Hassan no more, and see no more that beautiful far view from the citadel over the gray and dusty city to the desert, with the insolently aged pyramids, grayer and dustier still; and sit no longer on the verandah at Shepherd's while the silly and amusing world gambolled about us; and no more visit the garden of our affection or hear Strauss waltzes or *Carmen* at the Alhambra; or drive to the ostrich

farm and Heliopolis or the Bazaars; or shuffle about at the overgilded tombs of the Khalifs; or go fashionably late to the English chapel; or watch the brown-limbed *saïs* running before the great carriages; or bow to the Khedive as he and his suite passed us at Gezireh; or study the old Egypt at Boulak on the Nile; or applaud at the races; or give our last piastre to the amiable juggler, with his *galla! galla! galla!* cry on the hotel steps. There was nothing sweet in the sorrow of this parting. The beasts looked sadder-eyed than ever, and the butterflies and doves flying out from among the wild xenias in the garden were lovelier than before. Even the yellow-clad chain-gang making bricks like the Israelites had a certain joy in the sunlight not granted unto us who were leaving the bright sun. For the whirl that at first was estranging was no longer a maze. We had

found our step and our place. What a shame in a fancy-dress ball to be almost the first guests to leave !

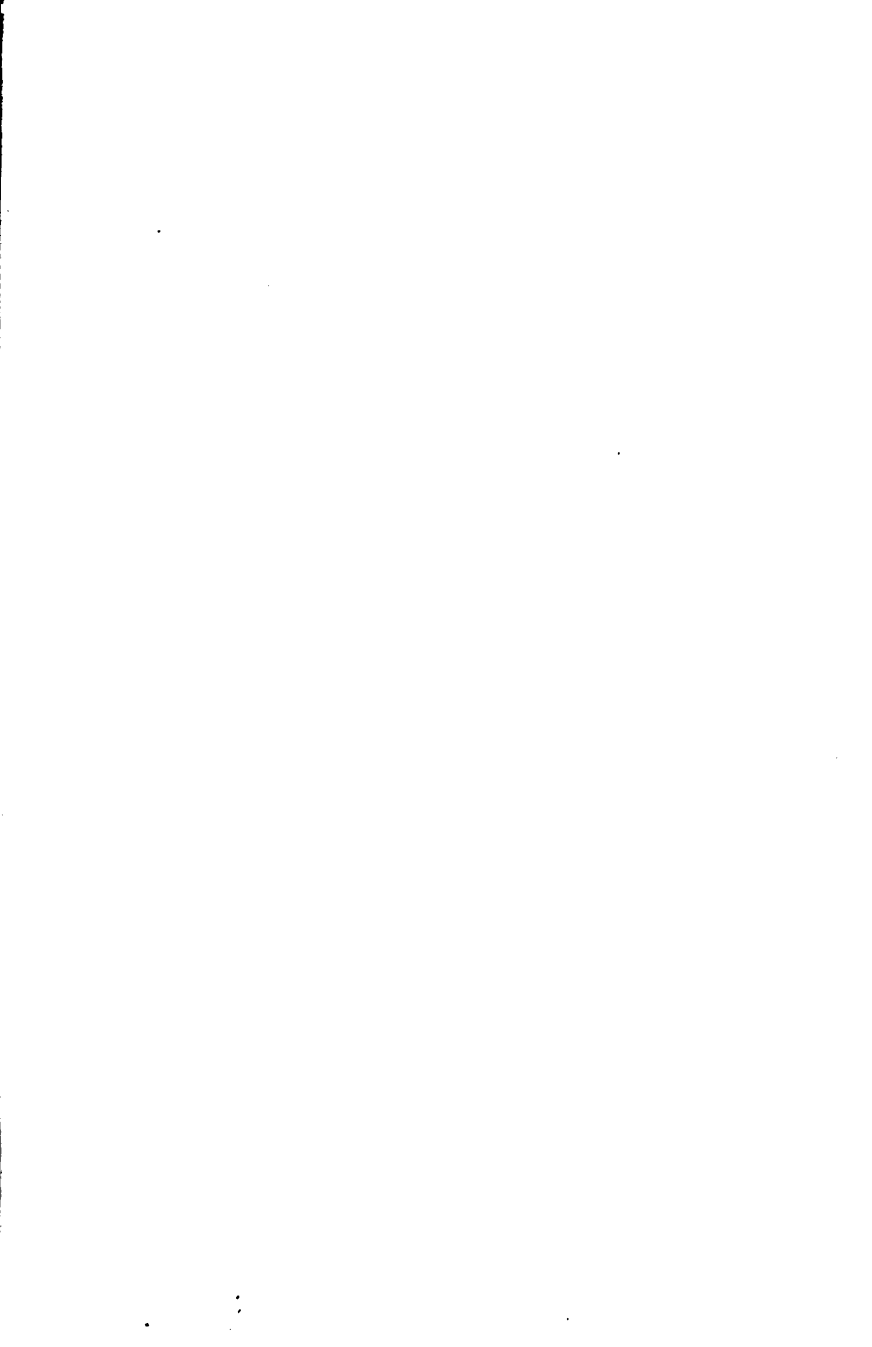
CAIRO, *February* 1889.

LONDON, *March* 1891.

THE END.







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